



PRESS CONTACT: Natalie Genter-Gilmore

503.445.3765

natalieg@pcs.org

M E D I A R E L E A S E

THE BODY OF AN AMERICAN

*AWARDED FIRST INAUGURAL EDWARD M. KENNEDY PRIZE FOR DRAMA INSPIRED
BY AMERICAN HISTORY*

February 25, 2013, Portland, Ore. - Columbia University and Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith announced Friday that Dan O'Brien's *The Body of an American*, which premiered in September 2012 at Portland Center Stage, and Robert Schenkkan's *All the Way* are the inaugural winners of the [Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History](#), known as the EMK Prize.

The judges voted unanimously to divide this year's award between two exceptionally deserving works. Both plays exemplify the mission of the prize by engaging "the great issues of our day through the public conversation, grounded in historical understanding that is essential to the functioning of a democracy."

"Dan's play first grabbed our attention because of the arresting premise," says PCS Artistic Director Chris Coleman, "But it was his vigorous use of language and the wildly inventive way he wove the story that convinced us to produce *The Body of An American*. To have the chance to watch its development, to be a part of the premiere, and now to have it recognized by others – is spectacularly rewarding."

Ambassador Smith created the EMK Prize to honor the life and legacy of her brother, the late senator from Massachusetts. The prize will be announced each year on Ted Kennedy's birthday, February 22. "We are very pleased and excited about this award in Ted's name," she said. "My brother loved the arts — museums, books, the performing arts. Music was perhaps dearest to him, but he and I shared an enjoyment of theater — especially, for Teddy, musical theater. He was also a great student of American

history and made it come alive for many of us in the Kennedy family. He was much beloved by all the family and he would be very pleased by this tribute.”

“I'm thrilled to receive EMK Prize, and I continue to feel grateful for what so many others have given to *The Body of an American* from the beginning,” says playwright **Dan O'Brien**, “Paul trusted me with his story first, and then so many artists have given bravely of their talents.” *The Body of an American* tells story of the fragile friendship formed between war reporter Paul Watson and playwright Dan O'Brien. War reporter Paul Watson has witnessed some of the most devastating scenes in modern history, and created perhaps the most disturbing image of modern warfare: the photograph of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. As the ghosts of the tragedies he's recorded bear down on him, his story catches the attention of playwright Dan O'Brien, who's battling ghosts of his own. In locations as varied as Kabul, Los Angeles and the Canadian High Arctic, the two men form a tentative friendship in a quest for absolution. *The Body of an American* is the story of their relationship, and the roles each take in helping the other process the responsibilities, and the damages, of bearing witness

PCS presented the world premiere of *The Body of an American* in September 2012 after it was part of the 2011 JAW: A Playwright's Festival. “PCS believed in the play from the beginning, understood my intentions perfectly and sympathetically,” says O'Brien, “and then facilitated the production process with ease. JAW, of course, was a crucial step from "finished" first draft to first production. It's a rare thing to have that kind of sustained artistic support in today's economic climate. And what a joy to be able to nab Bill Rauch from Ashland to direct this play! His intelligence, artistry and deep empathy were crucial for this play's first production.”

Both Dan O'Brien and co-winner Robert Schenkken will receive an award of \$50,000, and the Center for New Media Teaching and Learning at Columbia University Libraries will work with both recipients to create websites featuring study and teaching guides, historical research, and scholarly discussions and interpretations of the plays. The websites will be available to any theater artist, teacher or class studying the works with the intent of expanding understanding of the playwright's work and career.

“Columbia University Libraries is honored to administer this first year of the EMK Prize and is thrilled to be able to recognize two outstanding contributions to the American theater,” said James Neal,

Columbia's vice president for information services and University Librarian. "The websites that the Center for New Media Teaching and Learning builds for the winning plays will be powerful educational tools for teachers and students at schools and colleges all over the world."

Plays and musicals which received their first professional productions in 2012 were eligible for the EMK Prize. The other finalists, announced last December, were *Hurt Village* by Katori Hall, *Party People* by UNIVERSES, and *Rapture, Blister, Burn* by Gina Gionfriddo. The eight-person panel of judges is selected each year from a pool of playwrights, musical theater writers, lyricists, composers, scholars of literature, American history or political science, and includes Columbia University President Lee C. Bollinger.

The size of the award places the EMK Prize among the most generous given for dramatic writing, and indeed for writing in America, while the commitment to an in-depth and publicly accessible examination and exploration of content makes the prize unique among dramatic and literary awards.

The EMK Prize has potential for contributing to an elevation of the standards of precision, intellectual rigor and seriousness with which dramatic literature is approached by theater artists, audiences, educators, students and critics. Ambassador Smith, in honor of her late brother, hopes that the prize will galvanize a new and vigorous exploration of American history and the institutions of American politics among dramatists and creators of musical theater.

To learn more, visit <http://kennedyprize.columbia.edu/>

About Columbia University

Among the world's leading research universities, Columbia University in the City of New York continually seeks to advance the frontiers of scholarship and foster a campus community deeply engaged in understanding and confronting the complex issues of our time through teaching, research, patient care and public service. The University is comprised of 16 undergraduate, graduate and professional schools, and four affiliated colleges and seminaries in Northern Manhattan, as well as a wide array of research institutes and global centers located in major cities around the world. More than 40,000 accomplished students, award-winning faculty and professional staff define the University's underlying values and commitment to pursuing new knowledge and educating informed, engaged

citizens. Founded in 1754 as King's College, Columbia is the fifth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States.

About Columbia University Libraries

Columbia University Libraries and Information Services is one of the top five academic research library systems in North America. The collections include over 11 million volumes, over 150,000 journals and serials, as well as extensive electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, maps, and graphic and audio-visual materials. The services and collections are organized into 22 libraries and various academic technology centers. The Libraries employs more than 500 professional and support staff. To learn more, visit library.columbia.edu.

PORTLAND CENTER STAGE inspires our community by bringing stories to life in unexpected ways.

Established in 1988 as a branch of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PCS became an independent theater in 1994 and has been under the leadership of Artistic Director Chris Coleman since May 2000. The company presents a blend of classic, contemporary and original productions in a conscious effort to appeal to the eclectic palate of theatergoers in Portland. PCS also offers a variety of education and outreach programs for curious minds from six to 106, including discussions, classes, workshops and partnerships with organizations throughout the Portland metro area.

THE GERDING THEATER AT THE ARMORY houses a 599-seat Main Stage and the 200-seat black box Ellyn Bye Studio. It was the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first performing arts venue, to achieve a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certification. The Gerding Theater at the Armory opened to the public on October 1, 2006. The capital campaign to fund the renovation of this hub for community artistic activity continues.

###